



Bali: A Cultural History (Interlink Cultural Histories)

Arthur Cotterell

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A cultural history of this Indonesian island idyll

Bali is unlike anywhere else. Despite the advent of international tourism, this Indonesian island remains an untarnished cultural gem set in an idyllic landscape. Spirit-haunted as is the rest of Southeast Asia, Bali boasts a unique mixture of beliefs because Hinduism overlays a much older relationship with the physical world. Nothing is considered to be inanimate.

Towering volcanoes, majestic lakes, lush forests, gushing springs, flooded paddies, golden sands and blue seas - all these spectacular features have convinced the Balinese that their island is in itself a cosmos. Even though Bali suffered under the Japanese during World War II, in the struggle afterwards to expel the Dutch, and through the violence which accompanied the military overthrow of President Sukarno, the resilience and kindness of its inhabitants ensure that no visitor leaves the island today unimpressed by its heritage.

--Land of Temples: Besides an estimated 20,000 temples, there are hundreds of thousands of shrines for the good reason that hardly anywhere is said to lack divine significance.

--Festivals and Drama: So widespread are places of worship that every village and town possesses its own religious festival, an important part of which is dance-drama. Most popular is the story of the defeat of the chief witch Rangda by the good lion Barong, but the audience knows that she will be back again.

-- Art and Handicrafts: Because the Balinese believe that making beautiful objects is pleasing to the gods, artists and craftsmen are highly esteemed. On display along roadsides are their astounding works, which range from monumental sculpture to bright textiles.

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